



Base Realignment and Closure

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First METC grads make history

By Steve Elliott
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It might have been a small group of Airmen graduating at the Medical Education and Training Campus Nov. 4, but they made a huge historical impact as the first course to complete training at the billion-dollar joint training campus that opened in June.

METC, the crown jewel of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission's mandates for Fort Sam Houston, is an integrated campus under a single university-style administration, with more than 100 courses taught there.

The quartet of Air Force staff sergeants attended a two-week Pharmacy Craftsman course from Oct. 25 to Nov. 4, which is required for advancement to 7-level Air Force supervisory training in Air Force Specialty Code 4PoX1 and also for promotion to technical sergeant.

The course had previously been given at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas, and has now moved to METC where it will be a joint-service course.

"These four Airmen training with us have provided a model for others to follow," said Navy Rear Adm. William R. Kiser, METC commandant. "They were trained not only by Air Force, but by Army and Navy faculty as well. That will be the norm here at METC. This is the future of military medicine."

Air Force Staff Sgts. Cody Cole (Columbus AFB, Miss.), Tamika Isaacs-Powell (Keesler AFB, Miss.), Andrea Stein (Andersen AFB, Guam) and Carrie Villa (Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth, Texas) made up the class.

"You are what makes the Air Force and the military go. You're the managers," said Master Sgt. Gregory D. Tate, senior enlisted advisor and an instructor for the pharmacy branch. "We gave you the management skills you can use to go back and run your work areas."

"We will have formal graduations when other classes graduate, but the four of you are extraordinary," Kiser told the students. "There's something special about people who do something for the first time. There will be thousands and thousands of people that will graduate from here in the future. Only a few can be the first, so it's an honor for me to stop and reflect on this with you."

“The course helped with our managerial skills and fine-tune what we already knew,” Isaacs-Powell said. “Coming here from Keesler, I was expecting it to be a million of us fighting for attention, fighting for an opportunity to share what we do at our base. As the class continued, we really formed a bond and we were always talking and sharing knowledge.”

“These four are already practicing pharmacy technicians at their bases and they came here not only for a refresher, but a chance to work on their management and technical skills,” said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Chris Lynch, program director for pharmacy training at METC.

“Pharmacy is the only Air Force medical program that requires them to come back for an actual in-residence course, because the Air Force feels it’s important for them to have those hands-on skills,” Lynch added. “The pharmacy field is always changing, with new drugs and ways of delivering them.”

“Here we can learn with real drugs in the outpatient clinic, not just by using Skittles or M&Ms like we used at Sheppard,” Stein said, “In the IV room, they have the same equipment we would use at a deployed location. To be able to practice on that was really awesome.”

“Learning in this environment is unique because not only do students get the same course they would have gotten at Sheppard, but they get to experience it in a joint service climate,” Lynch said. “It’s not only what students learn in the classroom, but what they share between classes, just talking to each other about their experiences at their home bases.”

The next pharmacy class begins Nov. 17 and will have about 60 students, according to Lynch.

“Our classes will go with a maximum of 20 students per instructor, so we will be breaking them into three pods of 20 each,” Lynch said.

“They will be mixed across the services, so we’ll have Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen and Coast Guardsmen in each pod. Occasionally we’ll even get students from the military of other nations. METC really is the melting pot of medical training.”

“I want you to remember this day, our first course completion,” Kiser told the graduates. “This was an Air Force class graduating from a school on an Army post, run by a Navy admiral. It doesn’t get much better than that.”